The Quest for Interdisciplinarity in a Disciplinarized University

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Interdisciplinarity

• Rigid academic structures vs. demands for flexibility

• How to reform intelligent structures of intelligence?

• The challenge of legitimising interdisciplinary research
The Bologna Process

Three aspects are at the core of the new European Higher Education structure:

• Mobility
• Employability
• Interdisciplinarity

University

- Evolution: from general to specific focus
- Tendency: a place for interdisciplinarity (without denying the role of disciplines)
University

Mainstream (20th Century):
• Fragmentation (e.g. natural sciences split into geology + biology)
• Aggregation (e.g. bio+physics)

Against (or rather crossing) the mainstream (21st Century)
• Interdisciplinarity/integration (e.g. sustainability science)
Interdisciplinarity: stigmas

• Shallowness

• Generality

• Refuge for incompetence
Pitfalls and obstacles

• External metrics
• Non-peer evaluation
• Attracting eccentrics
A question still to be resolved: specializing first?

Training students in interdisciplinary programs at the college level?

or

Disciplinary undergraduate and then interdisciplinary graduate?
A paradox

• University = a place of intelligence aiming at renewing and creating knowledge
• Disciplines organised in epistemic communities, with their own rules, methods and jargon
• Barriers to interacting with other epistemic communities (Narcissus syndrome or discipline selfishness)
• A culture more favourable to fragmentation than to integration…
• … a limitation to addressing complex challenges
Conclusion

• Learning from non-academic research institutes (flexibility)
• Creating the metrics for interdisciplinarity
• The need for a “disciplinary anchor”
• Adapting the formal structure of the University (the Star Model)
• The relevance of building bridges connecting disciplines: I2S
THE STAR MODEL – INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENT

- University
- Interdisciplinary Units
- Group of Departments (Faculties, Institutes)
- Departments (disciplinary)
$I_n = \text{Interdisciplinary Center}$

$D_n = \text{disciplinary department}$

**THE STAR MODEL – FACULTY**
References:

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